



Town of Groton, Connecticut

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Meeting Minutes

Representative Town Meeting

Moderator Christine Conley, Representatives Karin Adams, Jean-Claude Ambroise, Joseph Baril, Alicia Bauer, Susan Deane-Shinbrot, Luanne E. DeMatto, John A. Espada, Robert M. Garcia, Patrice Granatosky, Dolores Harrell, Conrad F. Heede, Lynn Crockett Hubbard, Matthew G. Longino, Jim Loughlin, Lisa M. Luck, Brandon Marley, Jackie Massett, Bruce A. McDermott, Roscoe Merritt, Scott Meyer, Douglas Monaghan, Karen Morton, Kathy Neugent, Scott Newsome, Juliette M. Parker, Richard J. Pasqualini, Jr., Shawn Powers, John F. Scott IV, Richard Semeraro, Bill Smith, Judith Strode, Mark Svencer, Archie C. Swindell, Fred Turnbull, Patricia Wagner, Lori A. Watrous, Ivy R. Williams and Jonathan E. Wilson

Wednesday, September 10, 2014

7:30 PM

Groton Senior Center

Regular Meeting

A. ROLL CALL

Moderator Christine Conley called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

27 members were present, and a quorum was declared.

Members Present: Moderator Conley, Rep. Adams, Rep. Ambroise, Rep. DeMatto, Rep. Espada, Rep. Granatosky, Rep. Heede, Rep. Longino, Rep. Loughlin, Rep. Massett, Rep. McDermott, Rep. Merritt, Rep. Meyer, Rep. Monaghan, Rep. Morton, Rep. Neugent, Rep. Newsome, Rep. Pasqualini Jr., Rep. Powers, Rep. Scott, Rep. Semeraro, Rep. Smith, Rep. Strode, Rep. Swindell, Rep. Turnbull, Rep. Wagner and Rep.

Watrous

Members Absent: Rep. Baril, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Deane-Shinbrot, Rep. Garcia, Rep. Harrell, Rep. Hubbard, Rep. Luck, Rep. Marley, Rep. Parker, Rep. Svencer, Rep. Williams and Rep. Wilson

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Superintendent of Schools Mike Graner, Town Mayor Rita Schmidt, Kevin Trahan, Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher and Assistant Town Clerk Dawn Rahilly.

B. MOMENT OF SILENCE AND SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The members joined the Moderator in the Salute to the Flag.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF JULY 9, 2014

A motion that the minutes be approved was made by Rep. Pasqualini, seconded by Rep. Adams.

The vote on approval of the minutes carried 24 in favor, 3 abstentions. (Abstaining: Reps.

Ambroise, Monaghan and Swindell.)

D. CITIZENS' PETITIONS

None.

E. RECEPTION OF COMMUNICATIONS

Reps. Bauer, Hubbard, Marley, Parker, Williams and Wilson notified the Town Clerk they are not able to attend the meeting.

F. REPORT OF THE TOWN MANAGER

1. Financial report

Mr. Oefinger reported that the Fund Balance as of August 31, 2014 (unaudited) is approximately \$11.2 million; the General Contingency amount for FYE 2015 was appropriated at \$350,000; no transfers have been made from General Contingency; the Capital Reserve balance as of August 31, 2014 is estimated at \$2,477,468, an increase from the previous month mainly due to receipt of recording fees.

2. Monthly briefing

The Town Manager highlighted various items from the Town Manager's News, including that the Town of Groton was awarded an \$800,000 Small Cities Community Development Block Grant. The funds will be utilized to renovate approximately 64 units of elderly housing at Pequot Village.

Mr. Oefinger notified the members of the impending retirement of Finance Director Sal Pandolfo at the end of September, mentioning that the position has been advertised. Also retiring is Assistant Town Manager Doug Ackerman, with that position being advertised as well. An offer has been made to the new Director of Planning, and he will hopefully be on board by September 28th.

Mr. Oefinger gave a brief overview of various attachments to his newsletter. He highlighted a number of items including an invitation to Finance Director Sal Pandolfo's retirement party to be held September 18th, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Trust Fund Scholarship Dinner on October 16th, and a letter received from the Department of Economic and Community Development indicating Groton is no longer designated as a distressed municipality, but will continue to be eligible for benefits up to 2018.

Rep. Granatosky requested an update on the Poquonnock Bridge Fire Department, questioning how it affects the rest of the town. Mr. Oefinger reported on continued legal action between Poquonnock Bridge and the union, but as reported to the Council by the other fire districts, there does not appear to be a hardship from the aspect of public safety. At this point in time, things are manageable.

G. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Dr. Graner thanked the members for their support of the Board of Education's \$75 million budget. A spending plan was put together to address where the funds are most needed. He noted staffing is very stable and enrollment is in good shape.

Dr. Graner listed a few other sources of funding, a Title II Grant of \$140,000, to promote professional development and teachers' initiative at the High School; a Department of Defense Supplemental Impact Aid of \$390,000, to aid municipalities in lieu of property taxes. There is currently \$1.462 million in the fund, as it has been used as a savings account in the past. Dr. Graner suggested using a portion of the funds for a one time expenditure. He will recommend to the BOE a five year program for computer replacement. He would like to see every 9th grade student equipped with a Chrome Book. At \$230.00 each, the cost to the school system would be approximately \$77,000. This program has been hugely successful in other school systems throughout Connecticut and Dr. Graner feels the cost will be worth the results.

Rep. Morton noted that there are some students who do not have internet access at home. Dr. Graner noted that this is an important issue and that public buildings, such as libraries, have internet access.

Rep. Merritt agreed with Rep. Morton stating every student who has a laptop should have the ability to use it at home.

Dr. Graner also noted the BOE approved specifications for a new middle school to be built adjacent to Fitch High School, which would share the campus with the high school. The plan would include renovating the two existing middle schools and making them elementary schools. The State will pay 80% of the costs associated with the renovations. It could be a long term solution to the racial imbalance at Cutler and West Side schools.

It was also reported that 23 new teachers were hired, with four not being replaced. There are two new Principals, a new Assistant Superintendant and new Technical Director.

Rep. Neugent supports the use of Chrome Book, as teachers can tailor lessons to students' needs. She questioned the responsibility of the Curriculum Coordinator.

H. LIAISON REPORTS

Town of Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan Committee

Rep. Neugent reported that the committee met on August 27, 2014. Director Mark Berry reported on the presentation by Kent & Frost Landscape Architecture which included their recommendations for the Merritt Fields Master Plan and Comprehensive Athletic Fields Needs Assessment. A public hearing is set for September 29th.

The committee discussed establishing short term goals and projects recommended by the Parks and Recreation Commission and these will be reviewed at the next MPC meeting.

Economic Development Corporation Task Force

Chairman Scott made a motion to ask for a legal opinion the RTM's authority for the creation of an Economic Development Corporation as outlined in the accompanying attachment.. The motion passed unanimously.

The Moderator questioned if the RTM has the authority to create an Economic Development Corporation. She recommended that discussion be taken up under Other Business.

BOE/Town & City Council/RTM/City Council Liaison Committee

Rep. Watrous noted that Frost & Kent's assessment of Groton's playing fields revealed there is a shortage of all purpose playing fields.

Regarding the vacant schools, it was reported Fitch Middle School is being cleaned out in preparation to being turned over to the Town. LEARN will be leasing one wing of the building for two years. The Council passed a resolution to apply for a Brownfield grant for remediation of asbestos tile at Groton Heights School. Noank School will be demolished and William Seely School is still being used for Parks and Recreation.

The new Director of Buildings and Grounds is Sam Philpatrick. Updated contracts for Paraprofessionals, Secretaries and Custodians are complete. It was noted there would be more opportunities to share services if the Town and BOE were in one location.

I. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. FINANCE - Chairman Granatosky

No meeting; no report.

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & SERVICES - Chairman Semeraro

Chairman Semeraro read the minutes of the meeting held on September 10, 2014. (Minutes are attached to the permanent record.)

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Rep. Semeraro, seconded by Rep. Granatosky and so voted unanimously.

2014-0169

LaValley Property, Packer Road

LAVALLEY PROPERTY, PACKER ROAD

WHEREAS, William LaValley, the owner of 126 Packer Road, Mystic, has offered to give his vacant parcel to the Town of Groton as open space, and

WHEREAS, the acquisition of the LaValley property was referred to the Planning Commission under CGS Section 8-24, and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission recommended that the Town acquire the property for open

space because the property is wetlands, bounded by Haley Brook, within the 100 year flood plain, and within Groton Utilities' future water supply watershed, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Town Council accepts the LaValley property at 126 Packer Road, Mystic as open space.

A motion was made by Rep. Semeraro, seconded by Rep. DeMatto to approve accepting the LaValley Property on Packer Road.

Rep. Swindell inquired about other uses for the property, and the tax loss the Town would incur. Mr Oefinger responded it is wetlands, streams and flood plain, not usable property. The value of the property is from a resource protection standpoint. It may be of use to Groton Utilities at some point in the future. The property, currently assessed at \$90,000, generates \$1,300 in taxes yearly. The Town manager strongly recommends that the RTM approve accepting it as open space.

Mr Oefinger responded to Rep. Loughlin's question regarding the size of the property by stating it is less than an acre.

The vote to approve Resolution 2014-0169 carried unanimously.

3. EDUCATION - Chairman Swindell

No meeting; no report.

4. RECREATION - Chairman Svencer

No meeting; no report.

5. PUBLIC SAFETY - Chairman Pasqualini

No meeting; no report.

6. PUBLIC WORKS - Chairman Heede

No meeting; no report.

7. RULES & PROCEDURES - Chairman Ambroise

No meeting; no reports.

J. BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

None.

K. OTHER BUSINESS

Suspension of the Rules

A motion to suspend the rules for the purpose of discussion of a request for a legal opinion on the RTM's authority to create an Economic Development Corporation was made by Rep. Scott, seconded by Rep. Meyers.

The vote on suspension of the rules carried 23 in favor, 3 opposed and 1 abstention. (Opposing: Reps. Longino, Newsome and Semeraro. Abstaining: Rep. Merritt.)

A motion was made by Rep. Scott, seconded by Rep. Meyer, to ask for a legal opinion on the RTM's authority for the creation of an Economic Development Corporation. If the RTM lacks the authority to create an Economic Development Corporation, an opinion on how the Economic Development Corporation can be created in the Town of Groton. If there isn't authority for the RTM to create an Economic Development Corporation, a legal opinion on how the RTM can achieve the same objective.

Moderator Conley called for a brief recess at 8:35 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 8:41 p.m.

Rep. Semeraro stated that in his opinion the motion is very premature to be asking any lawyer to come up with ideas as to how to come up with a way to make it legal to form an Economic Development Corporation. He stated that the town has existing organizations. He supports allocating more resources to these groups to see what they can do, along with direction from the Town Council and RTM. He is against the motion for the reasons stated.

Rep. Swindell feels that if the RTM does not have the authority to create an Economic Development Corporation, asking for a legal option on how to accomplish it is not worth funding.

A MOTION TO AMEND Rep. Scott's motion to only include asking for a legal opinion on the RTM's authority for the creation of an Economic Development Corporation was made by Rep. Swindell, seconded by Rep. Meyer.

Rep. Scott stated he can not support the amendment.

Rep. Monaghan agreed with Rep. Swindell. If RTM does not have the authority, it is a waste of time arguing about how to do it.

Rep. Loughlin stated his concerns regarding the financial aspect. Taxpayers will want to know the source of funding. Mr. Oefinger responded that the decision comes from the Council, and it is premature at this time.

Rep. Granatosky explained to the body that if they were inclined to explore Rep. Scott's idea further then they should support the amended motion. She stated that three lawyers from this body agree that it is a good idea to keep the question to the Town Attorney simple. Members should support the amended motion and if the opinion comes back favorable, then the RTM can move forward on their desires.

Rep. Scott responded to concerns about the financial aspect raised by Rep. Loughlin stating that the RTM has authorized money in various buckets, he believes around \$350,000 - \$400,000, to go to Economic Development and feels it should be used.

The vote on the amendment carried 18 in favor, 9 oppositions. (Opposing: Reps. Espada, Heede, Longino, Meyer, Merritt, Neugent, Pasqualini, Scott and Semeraro.)

Announcements

Condolences to Rep. Merritt on the passing of his mother. Services for former Mayor Catherine Kolnaski will be held tomorrow at City of Groton Municipal Building.

L. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Rep. Scott. The Moderator adjourned the meeting at 8:53 p.m.

Attest:

*Betsy Moukawsher, Town Clerk
Clerk of the RTM*

Dawn G. Rahilly, Assistant Town Clerk